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A study to investigate the attitudes toward self, color, and racial role of selected white boys in two different institutions is presented. One group of children consisted of a minority of whites in an institutional setting, and the other was a majority group of white children. The research explored whether group behavior was based on group status and the role played, and whether white boys in a minority group behaved differently from white boys who were in a majority, or whether the total cultural background was so strong that they continued to act as if they were in the majority in all cases.

The children were twelve-year-old boys of varied backgrounds brought together in an institution for emotionally disturbed boys. The children were given the Trager-Yarrow Social Episodes Test and had interviews immediately afterwards. Parents were interviewed at home. Counselors, cottage parents, and caseworkers were interviewed in order to complete the study of each child. The study indicated that the white children in both institutions were almost unanimously prejudiced against Negroes. Actions could be influenced either by the behavior of the majority of children where the authority was permissive, or by the behavior of the authority where the authority was not permissive. In both institutions the children who were both prejudiced and discriminating came from homes where prejudice on the part of at least one parent was usually overt.

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SPECIAL ISSUE

RACIAL INTEGRATION

SOME PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES

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OCTOBER 1954

Bennett O. Stalvey

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WHEN WHITE CHILDREN ARE IN THE MINORITY

Joseph Rosner

The problems of minority group children have been of concern to individuals and groups involved in working through intergroup hostilities. Desegregation has vast implications for millions of children throughout the land. As a result of the recent Supreme Court decision, both the Negro and white children will have an opportunity to interreact for the first time in school settings in many areas of the United States. While it is the Negro child who is usually in a subservient position because of numerical or social inferiority, it is interesting to consider what would happen if the roles were reversed and the white group became the minority in both instances. Ordinarily these two conditions cannot both be fulfilled at the same time or place. A recent research, however, undertaken in two children's institutions for neglected, dependent and delinquent children, provided just such an opportunity.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes toward self, color and racial role of selected white boys in Institution A and Institution B. A. comparative study of individual and group self-perception was made in two selected groups of white children, one in which the whites were a minority in the institutional setting and another in which they were a majority. The research explored whether group behavior was in fact based on group status and the role played and whether *white* boys in a *minority* group (Institution A) behaved differently than *white* boys who were in a *majority,* (Institution B), or if the total cultural background was so strong that they continued to act as if in the majority in all cases. This study offered an unusual opportunity to see what happened in a setting where there has been an opportunity for complete contact between white and Negro children. In Institution A, white children and white adults in authority were in the minority. In Institution B the white children and white adults were in the majority. Thus, both institutions presented the reverse picture insofar as children and adults were concerned in relation to their numerical and social structures.

Both institutions accepted emotionally disturbed children with the same general problems for treatment. The subjects for the study, chosen from the white population in both institutions investigated, were remanded by the Children's Court of the City of New York. The comparative data used in describing the two groups was limited to referral source (Children's Court), race (white), age (mean age 12.0), I.Q. (mean I.Q. 93.4), religion (Catholic and Protestant), and psychiatric diagnosis (primary behavior disorder and psychoneuro-

sis). In addition, the nativity of parents, socio-economic status and dwelling facilities were equated. The reports of the probation officers on each child gave the above information. It was of interest to note that the children presented a wide variety of home backgrounds coming from diverse sections of the city, and living on different socio-economic levels.

No selection was employed at either institution, since the total population of white boys meeting the above conditions of the study, in both institutions, were included. The total number of children selected finally, was ten in each institution. The small number of children made it possible to study intensively the backgrounds and present life adjustments as they involved interracial relationships. It was not within the province of this study to investigate the attitudes and actions of the Negro children at either institution. Psychotic children were excluded from the study.

The children were tested and interviewed at each institution. One investigator saw each child in a private room that was not emotionally charged for him. Candy was available at all times and a permissive atmosphere was maintained during all interviews. The children were told that their cooperation was voluntary. In one instance a boy decided not to involve himself in the study and left. This was encouraged by the investigator because of the boy's obvious hostility. He returned when another boy who was seen earlier reassured him that "the man in the room is O.K." The privacy of an opinion was promised by the interviewer. Knowing the words used at each institution was of great importance in helping the children express themselves. It created rapport more quickly with children who often find adults hostile and ununderstanding of their needs.

The children were given the Trag[illegible]-Yarrow Social Episodes Test and had their first interview immediately after the Test. The Test consisted of three pictures each depicting play situations familiar to children. The first interview was a general discussion of the physical facilities of each institutoin and the friends the children had there. The children were seen in such a way that it was unlikley that friends would be able to prepare each other for the Test and interview. Where this did occur, in the instance already mentioned, it had no deleterious effect on the procedure or the child. The second and third interviews were also given each child at the institution shortly thereafter.

Parents were interviewed at home. Arrangements for these interviews varied. Parents were contacted by telephone and letter. In some instances it was found that less anxiety was produced if the interviewer simply presented himself without previously communicating

with the parent. In the lower socio-economic range this was found effective. The study was presented to the parents as a cooperative study undertaken by the Center for Human Relations, New York University, together with the institution involved. The parents were approached initially regarding the change in population which had taken place in their neighborhoods in the past ten years. This approach was found effective in helping parents express their feelings towards members of various minority groups. Since population shifts have taken place in New York City in the past few years, the question was relevant to all the parents contacted. Only one parent refused to be interviewed, out of a total of twenty case studies. In this instance it was known that this parent maintained a common-law relationship with her husband and was defensive about being seen even by institutional personnel.

Counselors, cottage parents and caseworkers were interviewed in order to complete the study of each child. Care was taken to establish relationships with the above groups of workers by contacting individuals on the recommendation of their friends at each institution. The investigator knew a few people at each institution studied and was thus able to use this method in order to establish rapport with the actual workers involved in the study. This part of the study was designed to obtain the day to day experiences of the children involved in the study. In addiiton it helped to give the self picture of the adult involved, insofar as it concerned his interracial attitudes. The final phase of the study was to read the case records of all the children in the study in order to obtain relevant background data on each individual child including his interracial adjustment at each institution.

The study indicated that the white children in both institutions were almost unanimously prejudiced against Negroes. However, the prejudice expressed verbally by the white children in both institutions did not usually express itself in the behavior of these same children. In brief, the prejudice that was obviously a part of the personality pattern of each child did not necessarily express itself in the form of discrimination or action. Both groups of white children accommodated themselves to their situations and accepted the total institutional atmosphere. Actions, it was discovered, could be influenced either by the behavior of the majority of children, where the authority was permissive, or by the behavior of the authority where the authority was not permissive. In Institution A, where the authority was permissive, and Negroes were in the majority, the role of the majority group was emphasized by the fact that Negroes cursed whites, but whites did not openly curse Negroes. The entire institution which

was permissive in its treatment philosophy, showed little prejudice on the part of the adults in positions of authority. However more open swearing and physical aggressions occurred over a given period of time. The role of the authorities in Institution B was much less permissive in relation to general institutional management and racial aggressions in particular than that of Institution A. However, it was discovered that while discrimination was forbidden, prejudice was overt on the part of staff and children alike at Institution B. The children in this latter institution openly joked about Negroes in imitation of the adults there. They called Negroes "jungle bunny," "charcoal" and other equally uncomplimentary names.

It was found in both institutions that children who were both prejudiced and discriminating came from homes where prejudice on the part of at least one parent was usually overt. The study, as planned, could not be certain that the harsh open prejudice stated by the parents of these children, was actually carried over into discriminatory action. However, it would be safe to assume so, since the children displayed this behavior in no uncertain terms at both Institution A and Institution B.

The group that was the majority in both institutions appeared to dominate the setting in terms of values, judgments, and verbal expression. The basic hypothesis of the study was thus supported in that it apeared that when white children became the minority in a group situation, their attitudes and actions differed from white children who were members of a majority group in a comparable institutional setting.

In considering what may be necessary for the future in relation to interracial education, it would seem that the authorities in charge cannot appear so permissive that prejudices will turn into discriminatory action against the numerical or socially unacceptable minority. Prejudices should be verbalized as an aid to release, expression and change. The children involved in this social change should be helped to realize that the negative feelings they have do not have to be translated into action. Helping children resolve this conflict which is also present in many other areas of their lives, will become the task of the educator in the immediate future and will help to determine the success or failure of translating a policy into a successful program.

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